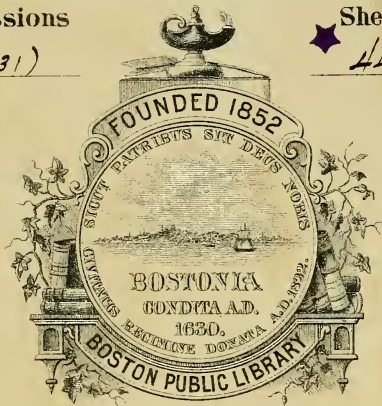


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MARATHON AND CHATTANOOGA.

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ADDRESS

ON

MEMORIAL DAY, MAY 30, 1890,

IN THE

FIRST PARISH CHURCH, DORCHESTER,

BEFORE THE BENJ. STONE, JR., POST 68, G.A.R.,

BY

EDWARD L. PIERCE,

A Member of the Post.

BOSTON:

PRESS OF ROCKWELL AND CHURCHILL.

1890.

Mr Lindsay Swift

(22681)

Dec. 23. 1890

MARATHON AND CHATTANOOGA.

COMRADES : — We meet again on this May day to commemorate our dead comrades who served in the Civil War. We come not as mourners, but rather to rejoice that such as they have lived. We dedicate the day to patriotism, to our common country, and to the free institutions which we have inherited from our fathers. The sentiments, which unite us as one people under one government, gain new vigor and life as we stand by the headstones of those who served well in the great civil conflict of the world's history, and pay our tribute to them in this sacred place. We come here with no sense of triumph over fellow-countrymen; and wherever those once arrayed against us celebrate to-day the devotion of fathers, brothers, and sons who fought for what they believed to be right, we send them our fraternal greetings, bidding them only to serve with us in the future for the common Union and the common Liberty. The country of Washington is their country not less than ours. For them, as for us, are all the promises of the Declaration of Independence, all the guarantees of the Constitution of the United States. The boon of the final result was more to them than to us, for it made them a free people and took away the only impediment to their progress.

It has been my fortune, within little more than a twelve-month, to stand on two renowned fields of war where human destinies were at stake, the one ancient and distant, and the other modern and within less than two days' journey — Marathon and Chattanooga. Divided though they are in time by twenty-three and a half centuries, they may be placed together in their relation to the permanent interests of mankind. The one arrested the triumphal march of Oriental despotism over Europe; the other arrested the progress of American slavery on this continent and insured the perpetuity of this Republic.

On a summer-like day of April of last year, after a drive from Athens of twenty miles, with Hymettus on the right and Pentelicus on the left, I stood and meditated on that plain, six miles in length and two in breadth, looking out across the strait on Eubœa, encircled by rugged mountains, treeless, marshy at the sides, covered with vineyards in the centre, the field where, five hundred years before the Christian era, ten thousand

Athenians, with one thousand volunteers from Plataea, charged on Persians more than ten times their number, and drove them to the sea. Byron, lover of Greece and familiar with the place, has described

“The flying Mede, his shaftless broken bow;
The fiery Greek, his red pursuing spear;
Mountains above, Earth’s, Ocean’s plain below;
Death in the front, destruction in the rear!
Such was the scene.”

A mound rises on the plain, its only elevation, raised by the Greeks to commemorate their fallen heroes whom they buried there. Their commander was Miltiades, supported by Themistocles and Aristides. The devotion of the Greeks on that day — of common soldiers and their chiefs — saved not only their country but Europe also from the Asiatic hordes who threatened civilization itself. The Persians had overrun the East; one empire after another had fallen before them, Lydian, Syrian, Armenian, Babylonian, Egyptian; they were masters of India and of the countries to the north, and they now threatened Europe as it was threatened a thousand years later by the Moslems. Greece, narrow in territory, limited in resources and men, but brave and skilful in arms, held the outpost; and at Marathon she arrested the career of Asiatic despotism. Nor was that her only achievement on that field. What she then did has ever since been an inspiration to mankind. Valor, patriotism, self-devotion, displayed on one day and in one country, are an example for all time and for all men.

A modern writer, Mr. Creasy, who has described in a volume the “Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World,” beginning with Marathon, including Saratoga, and ending with Waterloo, says of the first: “It secured for mankind the intellectual treasures of Athens, the growth of free institutions, the liberal enlightenment of the Western world, and the gradual ascendancy for many ages of the great principles of European civilization.”

But we need not go to antiquity or to remote lands to find examples of heroism, or to stand on fields where the interests of mankind were at stake. We have had such examples among us, those we have known and loved, and whom we now honor; and there are many fields in our country where fidelity and courage, no less than those of Marathon, were displayed in our Civil War. Ours, too, was a cause wide-reaching in its relations to humanity.

A few weeks ago I saw, for the first time, Chattanooga, a scene more picturesque than Marathon, where issues were decided greater than those which hung on the day when Greeks

confronted Persians. It is an opening six miles square, not much larger than the plain of Marathon, where the view from below is circumscribed by the mountains — the Cumberland Mountains — which divide the cotton from the grain-growing States, a great bulwark of nature, broken here by the Tennessee River, where it makes that curve which gives to the land it almost encircles the shape of an Indian's moccasin. It is a splendid amphitheatre, — mountains above and around and the winding river below. Here, where high ranges cluster, the three great States, Tennessee, Georgia, and Alabama, join hands. Here is all the romance of nature, — precipitous heights, lonely valleys, tortuous streams, fit retreats in other days of the eagles and the Indians, still haunted by the red men's legends. The time had come when this scene was to have an interest apart from nature and far more than nature in all its wildness could give it, as a decisive field for the cause of Liberty and Union. Here converged two lines of railway, one connecting the Mississippi with the Atlantic, and the other connecting the North with the Gulf of Mexico. It was a great strategic centre, essential to the unity of the Confederacy and to the easy transportation of soldiers, munitions of war and supplies from one part of its territory to another. Here our armies mustered from remote fields of war, from the Mississippi, the Cumberland, the Potomac, soldiers from the West and soldiers from the East, to maintain the unity of the Republic at its vital and central point.

This territory, smaller than many of our New England towns, bears the battle names of Chickamauga, Wauhatchie, Missionary Ridge, and Lookout Mountain. It is illustrated by the devotion of Union soldiers led by Rosecrans, Howard, Geary, Schurz, Sheridan, Hooker, Thomas, Sherman, Grant. Here are the graves of thirteen thousand Union soldiers, and of as many more who fought bravely on the other side. Among the wounded on one of these fields was one of my college mates, the colonel of the Thirty-third Massachusetts, Gen. A. B. Underwood, a soldier and citizen as finely tempered as Sir Philip Sidney, who lived till a recent period. It was at Missionary Ridge, Nov. 25, 1863, where one hundred thousand men, counting both sides, were engaged, that the rebel forces were beaten, and the way opened to Atlanta and the final dismemberment of the Confederacy.

Rarely in modern warfare has there been so much of romance as in this interesting locality. Pitched battles by light of day there were; but not these alone. Pontoon bridges were laid, and bodies of troops crossed and descended rivers in darkness, moving so noiselessly as not to startle the pickets on the banks; fierce onsets at night under a sky lit by

moon and stars, or beclouded; charges in the mist by day; soldiers discovering comrade and enemy by the flash of muskets; a thousand bayonets gleaming in the sun as the fog lifted; the climbing of precipices in face of deadly volleys of musketry; and most remembered of all, the dauntless Hooker and his men fighting "above the clouds," — a warfare miscellaneous and romantic, such as has never been witnessed within reach of the eye, from a single point, anywhere in the world.

The contest here, as elsewhere in our Civil War, was not between a superior and an inferior race, between armies differing in arms, in drill, and in chiefs, but on both sides there was the same people, of the same fibre and blood, practised in the same kinds of warfare, and inheriting the same soldierly qualities, with leaders taught in the same schools and by the same masters. It was not the vigorous European pitted against the worn-out Asiatic, an army of freemen against an army of slaves, modern artillery and firearms against primitive spears; but it was a contest in which each side matched the other, except as one or the other might at the time have the advantage of position or supplies or numbers. What was done at Marathon, — a handful of Greeks routing a horde of Persians, — was not possible in our Civil War.

The national triumph led to social and political changes of transcendent importance. It is not military transactions alone that concern the spectator who takes the view from Lookout Mountain to-day. The eye catches from that elevation glimpses of seven States — Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama, the two Carolinas, Virginia, and Kentucky — a territory which, including Virginia as she was when undivided, comprehends 338,000 square miles, more than the kingdom of Great Britain and the empire of Germany united. Their population in 1860 was seven millions and a half; it is now, or soon will be, double that number. Chattanooga was, thirty years ago, a quiet hamlet of two thousand people; it is now a city of fifty thousand or more inhabitants, ambitious for supremacy as the first city of the Southwest. It is by railways stretching out its hands in every direction; it is a great centre of traffic; it has a various manufacturing industry; it is a storehouse of mineral products; it exhibits, instead of the dead stillness before the Civil War, the life, the hope, the enterprise of the most aspiring cities of the Northwest. Its people are covering with homes the sides of the mountain, where railways are running to the summit, and villages are rising where once contending armies met.

In those seven States seen from Lookout Mountain there were in 1860 more than two and a half millions of slaves.

Now there is not a slave within their borders. Those who were bought and sold are now citizens, masters of their time, earners of wages, pupils in free schools, and voters at the polls. Chattanooga has two schools for colored children, containing fifteen hundred pupils. The colored man votes as freely there, and his vote is counted as honestly as with us. He is paid for his labor, and is more prosperous than the workingmen of a great portion of Europe. In considerable districts the conditions of the colored population are less favorable; but in view of the marvellous transformation which has taken place so generally in the South I have faith that time and patience, education and enterprise will renovate the whole. What one sees from Lookout Mountain typifies the South as it is, and is to be, from the Potomac to the Rio Grande; and one who stands there to meditate asks himself, What has done all this? What has made this new departure in history? What has given to civilization on this continent this new start, this new direction? The answer is at hand. The change did not come from a mere conflict of arms. War alone is a calamity, not a boon; it ravages and desolates; it spoils the husbandman, destroys capital, reduces population, deteriorates manly growth, and demoralizes peoples, conqueror and conquered alike; but a war with ideas and principles at stake may greatly develop and advance humanity, — and such was ours.

Whatever interest may attach to marches and battles, war, it must ever be remembered, is never justifiable except as a last resort in saving some great cause, in promoting some great idea. John Bright once said to me, "If ever a war were just, it was your Civil War;" and what is it that distinguishes our Civil War from the bloody conflicts which fill the pages of history? It was, in the first place, the cause of the Union, of, as it has been called, "an indestructible union of indestructible States." Here was a country vast indeed in extent, stretching from ocean to ocean, and through twenty-three parallels of latitude, divided at one time among several discoverers, England, France and Spain; but wide as it was, it was nevertheless stamped with physical unity, nowhere cut asunder by barriers not yielding readily to modern enterprise and skill, traversed by rivers which from source to mouth were made for one sovereignty, peopled for the most part by one race, speaking one language, believing the same religion, governed by one law, inheriting the same traditions, reared under republican forms, all sharing in the memories and glories of the American revolution, and, as children of one Father, revering the exalted name and character of Washington. The Mississippi and its great tributaries could never be shared in peace by rival nations. The Father of Waters must flow un-

vexed by their strifes to the sea. Above all, the experiment of self-government on this continent was to be a failure, — “a lost cause,” — if the Republic were once cut in twain, and the way opened to other divisions between East and West, ending no one could tell when or where. The cause of Union was, therefore, not one of territory, of empire, of dominion; it was the cause of free government, of American hopes and destiny, of civilization.

The Revolution, which divided us from Great Britain, made us a nation, free and independent; but the pride, the affections, the loyalty of the people for a long period gathered about the States, themselves the successors of the colonies. The sentiment of common nationality, weak at the beginning, comparatively weak even when the Constitution was made, advanced from year to year, imperceptibly at times, and now and then with rapid strides under favoring events.

As our commercial relations extended, the flag of the Union became the symbol of protection to the American citizen wherever in foreign lands business or adventure might call him. The War of 1812 quickened the sentiment of Union. The insubordination of South Carolina called for General Jackson's proclamation, with the memorable words, “The Federal Union! it must and shall be preserved.” Webster's reply to Hayne, read by all citizens, declaimed in ten thousand schools, lifted the people to a conception of national unity. Thousands and tens of thousands of Fourth-of-July orations, sometimes of real merit, often turgid and vainglorious, have, nevertheless, together with the festivities of that anniversary, done much to inspire the people with a love of their past history, and confidence in the future of the Republic. And at last came the great conflict in which fought side by side soldiers of all the States, with their flags intermingled, tramping together in long marches, communing by the same camp fires, moving together in steady phalanx when the final order of “Charge” was given, sharing in common glories and buried in common sepulchres, making the union of the States and of the people thereof, not only grander in our imagination, but dearer than ever in our hearts. My comrades, it is our happy fortune to have lived in this period of a broader patriotism and an intenser national spirit, and to have borne our part in making that patriotism and that national spirit what they are to-day.

But our cause was not that of Union only, it was the cause of Liberty as well. Our fathers did the best they could under the lights they had, but inheriting slavery they were compelled, as they thought, to tolerate it as a local institution, hoping and believing that it would soon pass away; but in this their foresight was at fault. The one institution which they supposed to

be temporary proved to be a permanent cause of division. It increased in power and numbers with the production of the great Southern staples of cotton and tobacco and with the expansion of our territory. Its supporters grew in pride and ambition, and at last sought to make it perpetual and spread it beyond its old limit, even to the Pacific Ocean. Thwarted by a popular uprising, in 1854, when they had achieved their triumph in repealing the anti-slavery restriction, the bargain by which they gained a slave State in 1820, they plotted a revolution, and finally, in 1861, they struck boldly at the national existence. When the Civil War began, the idea prevailed with conservative leaders that the national power — our armies in the field and our navy on the coast — must be confined solely to the preservation of the Union, leaving untouched the institution of slavery. But Providence was wiser than great men; it had purposes which even Lincoln and Seward did not see. The contest was prolonged, with disaster here and waiting there, till the nation rose at length to see more clearly its duty and its destiny, and at last came the declaration in the name of the American people, their solemn resolve before heaven and all mankind, that freedom for all men of every race should prevail everywhere under the American flag. Under that inspiration our forces were led, and mankind came to see our cause in its true light.

The Civil War did something more than maintain the principles of union and liberty. It tested American character. Before 1861 we were thought by foreign critics to be a money-getting and money-saving people, thrifty, mercenary, skilful in mechanic arts, energetic in subduing the wilderness; but, with all this, unfitted for high action, wanting in the romantic qualities which great crises demand. Our republican polity was said to be plain, uninspiring, not appealing to the sensibilities and the imagination, like a dynasty decorated with crown and sceptre and tracing its origin to a misty antiquity. We felt ourselves that there might be some truth in this statement of our limitations, and this doubt accounts for the disposition of some of our public men at the outset to let the seceding States go in peace. But the war revealed the latent virtue and force of the American character, the self-devotion, endurance, courage, and faith of the American people, their readiness to suffer and die for their country. The four years of civil war are filled not merely with what armies did, but with individual deeds of sacrifice and daring equal to anything witnessed in the ages of chivalry. Legend commemorates the Roman who held the bridge; but was not Chaplain Fuller more than his peer, who, with no duty as a soldier, volunteered to cross the Rappahannock in face of certain death? The story

of another Roman, whose breast was covered with scars, has been recounted ever since, and is conned by the schoolboy to this day ; but was not he matched by General Bartlett whom we have known, and by countless more? We are familiar with the Spartan mother and the Roman matron, but we have seen mothers, wives, and sisters with no exceptional intelligence and sensibility, bidding those dearest to them to go forth in the service of the country, bearing their solitude without a murmur, and waiting, waiting long for the footsteps which were to be heard no more. The American woman in her high sentiment, in her steadfast faith, in her resignation to bereavement in the cause of country, passes to the front among the heroines of history.

Comrades : — there is no honor so great as to have served in the national army in our Civil War. Courage, self-sacrifice, the offer of life and fortune on the altar of one's country, have been commemorated in all ages with tributes of honor, with statues, memorial tablets, and grateful epitaphs ; and it will be for you ever to remember, and for posterity to bear witness, that the cause which you saved was that of "liberty and union, now and forever, one and inseparable !"

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